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Near East and South Asia Review

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Supplement
1 January 1988

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**Near East and
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Article

Pakistan: Maintaining Close Military Ties to China

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Pakistan and China share common rivals—India and the Soviet Union—and have maintained good relations since the 1960s. Islamabad sees Beijing as its most reliable foreign friend, and since 1979 they have forged a de facto strategic partnership. Pakistan gets weaponry and, more important, an Asian friend strong enough to worry India and the Soviet Union.

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Near East and South Asia Review

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Article

Pakistan: Maintaining Close Military Ties to China

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Pakistan and China have long recognized they share common rivals—India and the Soviet Union—and have maintained good relations since the 1960s. Islamabad sees Beijing as its most reliable foreign friend, and since 1979 the two nations have forged a de facto strategic partnership. Pakistan gets weaponry and, more important, an Asian friend strong enough to worry both India and the Soviet Union.

required to match the Indian inventory. By buying from the Chinese Pakistan obtains large quantities of older, but still useful weapons. US diplomats in Islamabad report, for example, the Chinese A-5 jet attack aircraft costs about \$3.5 million, as compared with about \$12 million per aircraft for a stripped-down version of the US-made F-16.

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Pakistan considers China its most reliable supplier. Islamabad first turned to Beijing for military aid after the United States and the United Kingdom embargoed arms to Pakistan during the war with India in 1965. China has never suspended shipments to the Pakistani military. Pakistani concerns about another Western arms cutoff have persuaded the military to maintain close ties to the Chinese and to purchase Chinese equipment that could be replenished and repaired even if Pakistan were denied access to Western weapons and spare parts.

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We believe Pakistan will remain close to China, but Islamabad will not enter into a formal alliance or mutual defense pact with Beijing. Pakistan needs Chinese weapons and developmental assistance for its growing arms industry and would rely more heavily upon China in the event of a cutoff of US aid. Because of the tenuous overland route between the countries and their need to defend their borders, we believe that neither would commit troops in support of the other, but coordinated military demonstrations are possible.

The Chinese help maintain many of the weapons that were built in China.

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Benefits for Pakistan

Arms. Pakistan has relied on Chinese weapons to flesh out its armed services since the first Sino-Pakistani arms deal in 1965. Almost three-fourths of the Army's tanks are Chinese, as are more than half the Air Force's combat aircraft and several of the Navy's support ships and patrol craft. Pakistan's armed forces also use Chinese-made artillery, surface-to-air missiles, trucks, bulldozers, radios, radars, and ammunition.

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Islamabad buys Chinese equipment and arms because they are relatively cheap. Pakistan cannot afford expensive US or Western equipment in the numbers

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What China Receives in Return

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Diplomacy. Pakistan and China have kept their good relations highly visible to regional rivals. Prime Minister Junejo traveled to Beijing for his first official foreign visit, for example, and the Chinese Navy made a port call in Karachi in 1985—its first visit to a foreign port since 1949. [redacted]

Beijing publicly supports Pakistan's policy in Afghanistan. [redacted]

China gives the Afghan insurgents arms and humanitarian aid, which help relieve the strain on Pakistan to support both the Afghan resistance and the 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Beijing also lends quiet but steady diplomatic support to Pakistani policies by consistently praising Islamabad's negotiating efforts in the Geneva peace talks and condemning the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. [redacted]

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The Karakorum highway is another symbol—but little more than that—of China's willingness to aid Pakistan. Running from Islamabad to Kashgar, China, the highway was begun with Chinese assistance in the 1960s and completed in 1978—despite Indian protests—as a gesture of Chinese support for Pakistan's claims to Kashmir. [redacted] the highway is narrow, subject to weather conditions and landslides, and for long stretches in China it is little more than a cart path. We believe that, without substantial improvements, the road could only carry small amounts of supplies should Beijing support Pakistan in a conflict. [redacted]

Diplomacy. Islamabad has assisted Chinese diplomatic efforts. For example, during the Sino-Indian border crisis in 1987, Pakistan pleaded Beijing's case to the United States and other countries. [redacted]

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Developments in 1987
Over the last year Islamabad has negotiated or concluded several arms deals with Beijing, all on terms favorable to Pakistan. The Chinese completed and delivered a new fleet oiler to the Pakistani Navy

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last summer. [redacted] the Navy did not need a new oiler but was probably offered a deal it could not refuse. In June the Pakistani Air Force agreed to buy 50 F-7M fighters from China to be delivered in 1988. [redacted]

[redacted] Beijing offered attractive terms. Pakistan purchased 95 improved Type-69 tanks in July, and, according to the US Embassy, Vice Chief of Army Staff Aslam Beg said he bought the tanks for a price that he believed would buy only 40 Type-69s.

[redacted] is also buying howitzers, rockets, trucks, bulldozers, and radios, probably as part of a Chinese military aid program involving low-interest loans. [redacted]

In addition to the arms deals, the military leadership of Pakistan and China has exchanged numerous visits over the last year. [redacted]

Limits to the Relationship

Pakistan and China have always weighed their assistance to one another on the strict scale of self-interest. Neither would put its own security at risk to aid its partner. China moved troops and threatened India during the Indo-Pakistani war in 1965 but did not attack. Beijing did even less during the 1971 conflict. [redacted]

Neither country lent more than private encouragement to the other during border crises with India in 1987. Beijing counseled restraint when Islamabad feared war would break out over the Indian Army's "Brass Tacks" maneuvers last winter. Similarly, Islamabad sympathized with China during the Sino-Indian border crisis over the summer, and recommended restraint. [redacted]

The Future of the Partnership

Pakistan will continue to buy weapons from China and would almost certainly increase its reliance on Beijing in the event of a long-term suspension or cancellation of US military aid. Apart from the uncertainties in the US relationship, the Pakistani Army needs a large number of new tanks, while the Air Force is facing the expensive task of replacing its aging fighter fleet with 100 to 200 modern aircraft. These modernizations will be expensive, and, to get the quantity of weapons the Pakistan military believes it needs, Islamabad will be forced to buy Chinese equipment. Pakistan also wants to ensure a steady supply of spare parts for the weapons it has and believes China would not cut its supplies in a crisis. [redacted]

Pakistan and China will not sign a formal alliance or mutual defense pact, in our opinion, and would probably provide only material and diplomatic support to each other in a war with India or the Soviet Union. This unwillingness to forge an alliance reflects each nation's overriding concern for its own interests and security. In our judgment, neither Islamabad nor Beijing desires to become entangled in a conflict started by the other or be committed to rescuing a beleaguered partner. The two nations also may be concerned that an alliance would encourage India and the Soviet Union to cooperate more to neutralize a Pakistani-Chinese combination. [redacted]

Beijing would probably limit its aid to Pakistan in another Indo-Pakistani conflict. In our opinion, Beijing would not send troops to Pakistan if it were attacked by India or the Soviet Union but might try to

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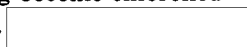
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intimidate Indian forces along the Sino-Indian border if New Delhi were on the verge of defeating Pakistan.



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Pakistan would share intelligence and lend diplomatic support to Beijing in a Sino-Indian conflict but would try not to become a combatant itself. Islamabad would step up its collection and sharing of information on Indian forces and intentions and might provide the Chinese with small amounts of materiel support, such as Western-made missiles or electronic gear. We believe Pakistan would not attack India during such a conflict, but, if Pakistan did, it would limit its efforts to harassment in places where Indian defenses were spread thin by fighting elsewhere. We believe there is little or no chance Pakistan would provide military assistance to China should Beijing become embroiled in fighting with the Soviet Union.



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